

History of the School

Written by Verna M. Tagg May 18, 1906

[Gray] There have been six different schools on Clatsop Plains. The first one was taught in a corner of a house where Mr. W. H. Gray then lived. It afterward was sold to John Loomis and is called the Loomis place. School was taught there in 1845. Only a few children went. Mr. Thompson, a Presbyterian minister taught awhile. Afterward Rev. J. L. Parish. When he taught, there was only Mr. Smith's, Mr. Morrison's, and his own children attending. He did not receive any pay. This first school house was about eight miles from where the present school house is. Mr. William Morrison now has a bench at his house which was used in Mr. Gray's house. Mrs. Carnahan used to sit on this bench at school.

The second school house was a little log building which Mr. Morrison built in 1847 right near his house. Miss Lucy Jane Fisher boarded with Mr. Morrison and taught the school, then Miss Bell taught it. Her husband left her there to teach while he went to the gold mines in California, where she also went afterward. In this schoolhouse was what was called a stick chimney to the fireplace. It was made of short sticks, only about eighteen inches long, crossed over each other, two each way and the holes filled with clay. Mrs. Carnahan says she and her brothers and sisters carried from the hills back in the woods, the clay to build this chimney with, but she cannot remember just whereabouts they got the clay.

The third school house was on Mr. Taylor's place on the East side of the County road, right near John Welch's house. This schoolhouse was also used for a church. When a minister came along service would be held in it. This school house was also built of logs. Mr. Elder taught this school.

In 1850 the Presbyterian Church was built. It stood on the hill near the graveyard. This is where school was held for the fourth time. Some of the teachers of this school were Mr. Brock, Mr. R. K. Warren (cousin of D.K. Warren) and Miss Ketchum, who came from the East. She married Mr. Hills while out here and then both went to New York. A few of the scholars of this school were Bob Caruthers, William Welch and Charlie Shively, who came over here from Astoria, to go to school as there was no school in Astoria then.

There were only two school districts at this time, from Skipanon, the other reached from near Skipanon to Seaside.

Mr. Samuel Hall had taken up a donation land claim of six hundred and forty acres as he thought, but afterwards the law was changed so that only a married man could hold six hundred and forty acres. A man could have three hundred and twenty acres and his wife three hundred and twenty acres so Mr. Hall, when he wanted to sell, could only sell three hundred and twenty acres. He left this land for the benefit of the Clatsop school and Mr. L. H. Judson bought it. Then, to pay for this land Mr. Judson built the school house and gave a small piece of land for the school yard. This was the fifth school house. When Mr. Hall gave the land for the school, there were people living above the Carnahan place and below the Jewett place that he did not like, so when he gave this land he said he did not want these people to have any benefit from the school, so then the school district was divided. Before this time the people had to pay to send their children to school and the teacher had to board at the house from where there were most children going to school. They had only short terms, just three or four months and if they wanted a longer term the families had to pay for it. But when Mr. Hall left this land the money got from selling this land was used for the school so the teachers could be paid enough money so they could board at one place all the time, for the people who boarded the teachers before this did not get any pay from them, but did not have to pay so much to send their children to school. Some of the first teachers were Mr. Hurlburt, who was the first teacher, Judge McBride and Mrs. Thos. Handley. He and his family lived upstairs in the Glenwood house and he and his little boy would walk every morning down to the school, a distance of about four miles.

Mr. Chapman was also an early teacher of the school.

(She then relates how on Friday afternoons people would gather in the school house in those days for spelling matches. Captains would be chosen and lots drawn to see who had first choice for his side. William Morrison was often chosen first as he was a good speaker. As each person missed, he or she must sit down and the object was to see who could stand last. Women even took to studying the spelling books between times and the hardest words were used from them. Then the almanac was used as a source. These spelling bees were about the only community social event and were much enjoyed by every one.

The sixth school house was built in 1892 on the same piece of land, but a little farther east. It faced north, as did the first. It was finished on October 21, of that year and a big celebration was held. Many people came to it. Dad, Alec Duncan and Will West all say, however, that the very first log school building to be built at the site of the Clatsop school, was built across the road to the north. Apparently it was used only a short time. It sat up off the ground and under it there was a hollow spot. Pigs belonging to the Callenders would get under it and root and lie in that hollow. This, then, would have been the fifth school and the sixth the one built just across the road to the south and facing north. It sat just east of what is the highway now, on a small ridge that runs north and south. Beside it was a swale where the small boys hunted frogs to put in jars and take in to plague the teachers. That would make the building, built in 1892 the seventh. In that one Mr. Lyman taught, Mama taught and later, I also, taught.)

1870A Alec Duncan related -- At the north end of what was the Gearhart property and east of the county road was a piece of ground not used except as a sort of park and public picnic ground. There were lots of wild roses on it and over near the railroad a grove of crabapple. There on Fourth of July there was always a big celebration to which every one on Clatsop plains would go. One thing which always took place on that day was the reading of the Declaration of Independence. Of course small boys -- and he was one at that time -- were not too interested in that but had a wonderful time at their own more lively amusements.

Told by Maude West Prescott-- Her first teacher in the Clatsop school was a Mr. Moore. He also made cheese and worked for her father in the summer in his cheese factory, teaching school for the district during the winter. That was about the year 1879. During the 1880s a Mr. McGinnis taught and was Rose Johnson's teacher during her early reading experience. He came from Nova Scotia and had such a brogue that the children picked it up. Mrs. Prescott said that it was some time before Rose could read without using the brogue quite noticeably. Mr. Lyman came to the district during these years also. He was quite a scholarly man and very well liked. He introduced more of poetry and the classics than the children had ever come in contact with before and some of the poems which they learned to recite stayed with them through life. He broadened their vistas in the educational field and was also such a kindly person that his former pupils seem to have mainly happy memories of him. One story told is of his attempting to climb Saddle Mountain. He was lame and used a crutch and before he had reached the top felt the climb too much and decided to turn back. Gus Grunl was with him and when he found that Mr. Lyman couldn't go on and planned to turn back Gus said, "Oh no. You've done a lot for my children, now I'll help you." He then took Mr. Lyman on his back and carried him the rest of the way to the top.

Emma Sayre was the teacher at Clatsop in 1889.